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PLANE-UTAH

The CIA Friday branded as "absolutely ridiculous and utterly irresponsible" allegations by a former agent that U.S. intelligence put special spy equipment aboard Korean Air Lines Flight 007 and deliberately routed it over Soviet territory.

Retired CIA agent Ralph W. McGehee made the allegation Thursday before students at Weber State College in Ogden, Utah.

A 25-year CIA veteran, McGehee has been critical of the agency since his retirement several years ago. He said the U.S. government worked with the South Korean government to deliberately use the Korean 747 jet on an espionage mission over Soviet territory.

The airliner was shot down by a Soviet jet Sept. 1 with the loss of all 269 aboard.

McGehee also alleged he was being followed by agents of the CIA and said the agency was tapping his telephone.

CIA spokesman Dale Peterson said, "On the record, both of those allegations are absolutely ridiculous. His allegations of intelligence use of the South Korean airliner is utterly irresponsible."

At a speaking engagement Thursday at Weber State College in Ogden, Utha, McGehee charged:

"The evidence is overwhelming that this was a planned event by the United States to send a commercial airliner equipped with spy equipment into the Soviet Union, thinking they would not shoot it down," he said.

He said he does not think the Soviets realized the Korean Air Lines Boeing 747 jet was a commercial airliner and mistook it for a nearby circling RC-135 spy plane.

"I don't think the Soviets knew it was a commercial airliner," he said.

McGehee, who joined the CIA in 1952, said he is followed by the intelligence agency and it also taps his telephone. He said the agency is not being totally honest with the information released on the incident.

He said the day of the KAL 007 flight the Soviets planned an ICBM test launch and the airliner with 269 people aboard "wandered" directly over that area as well as over several major Soviet military installations.

In addition to the presence of the airliner and the sophisticated RC-135 spy plane, he said, an American relay satellite passed directly over the commercial airliner, both as it flew above the ICBM test site and again as it passed over the military installations.

"In 1978 the United States did a similar thing and the Soviets forced the plane to land," he said.

"With Flight 007 the United States had no intention for the plane to be shot down and thought they were getting the best of both worlds," he said. "The United States would get the information and Russia would get a black eye."